



Bawtry Heritage Group

Preserving our Past for the Future

Registered Charity No. 1188945

THE HUNT FOR ROMAN BAWTRY

GARDEN ARCHAEOLOGY DN10 6HP

4TH - 7TH AUGUST 2026.

Dig Team - Mick Maguire, David Kirkham and Michael White.

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BACKGROUND.

The catalyst for this activity came from the community engagement element of the Bawtry Heritage Group (BHG) Hunt for Roman Bawtry desktop project, June 2024-June 2025. During this part of our research we received an eyewitness account from 30 to 40 years ago, of a mosaic floor in situ on a construction site within the DN10 6HP postcode.

THE DIG SITE.

The Bawtry Heritage Group is keeping the precise location of the dig site protected. It was not possible to conduct any on-site examination in the immediate area of the original floor sighting. Several locations within the surrounding area had been identified earlier in the year, as having potential to advance the pursuit of physical evidence regarding the eyewitness account. In conjunction with members of the Segelocum Archaeology Group, this site was chosen, being considered as the most promising amongst a small selection. As it is a private garden the home owner's privacy needs to be considered.

The prime location for our activity within the garden was an area directly under the greenhouse in photograph one below. It was at this location, sometime before the mosaic sighting and during the construction of the greenhouse that the resident believed he disturbed tesserae which may have been parts of a demolished mosaic floor .



Photograph 1

After discussion it was also considered worthwhile to test the area immediately behind the greenhouse given what was known about the position of the floor and potential orientation of any building containing the original sighting. This is shown in photograph two.



Photograph 2

THE DIG.

AREA ONE - BENEATH THE GREENHOUSE.

Having cleared a space in which to work a shallow trench was excavated, approximately 6ft by 2ft on the greenhouse's northern edge. This removed the top soil to a depth of about 6 inches and brought us down onto a virgin surface. All the spoil was carefully sifted and examined for finds of interest.

The second phase resulted in the digging of a 2ft by 2ft sondage, a small trench within a trench, to a depth of 2 feet. It was confirmed by the resident once at this depth, that we were considerably deeper than he had originally gone all those years before. Once again all the spoils were carefully sifted. Photograph three presents the sondage at the conclusion of activity.



Photograph 3 Sondage Area One

AREA TWO - BEHIND THE WESTERN END OF THE GREENHOUSE.

Guided by the activity in area one a 3ft by 2ft trench was dug in area two to a depth of approximately 2ft 6 inches. As with area one all excavated spoil was sifted.

Photograph four depicts this trench at its conclusion. On the eastern side of the trench a single line of bricks, only inches below the surface was discovered. This line of four bricks were planted on top of the soil. A metal brick tie was exposed hinting that originally at least one more layer of bricks was likely to have been part of whatever the construction had previously been. The bricks exposed appeared relatively modern, either late 19th or early 20th century. Metal brick ties came into use in the late 19th century but their use accelerated in the early 20th.¹ We were able to ascertain that this line of bricks continued just below the surface in both directions for an unknown distance.



Photograph 4 Trench area two.

¹ Google Search.

FINDS

Although we were able to dig well below the depth the resident had indicated he had originally gone to, we were limited by ageing human resources, minimal equipment, hard scorched impacted ground and heatwave conditions.

Unfortunately the areas dug did not provide evidence relating to the verbal reports of the eyewitness and nothing directly relating to any structure that would be commensurate with a basic mosaic floor.

We have to accept that we might not have been able to dig deep enough or that the location might not be directly in alignment with the structure that contained the mosaic floor witnessed. Time and human factors limited the amount we could physically achieve, possible alignment issues will remain inconclusive until any original structure is discovered.

However, as with most archaeological quests some things were found and with appropriate care and consideration they serve to pique interest, pose questions and open new understanding, and areas of study.

Below are images of the most noteworthy finds that emerged from both trenches.



Photograph 5 General Domestic Pottery (d.unkw).



Photograph 6 General Domestic Pottery (d.unkw).



Picture 7 Fine Domestic Tableware (d.unkw).



Picture 8 Plain White Domestic Pottery (d.unkw).



Picture 9 Clay Pipe stems. In wide use between 1600-1930.

Thinner stems with small bore holes indicate more recent dates.²



Picture 10 Iron fittings, probably some form of door or gate latch.

² Google search.



Picture 11 Two unusual finds perhaps related to old toys.

Left a boot and right a portion of a doll's face. (d.unkw)



Picture 12 Animal tooth, thought to be sheep.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary aim of this endeavour was to seek evidence to support the eyewitness account relating to a mosaic floor observed around 3 decades ago during a construction project 10-20 metres away from the dig site. This particular location was considered to be the number one opportunity amongst others with more limited potential. This conclusion was boosted by observations made by the site owner sometime before the floor sighting involving possible tesserae discovered when constructing his greenhouse.

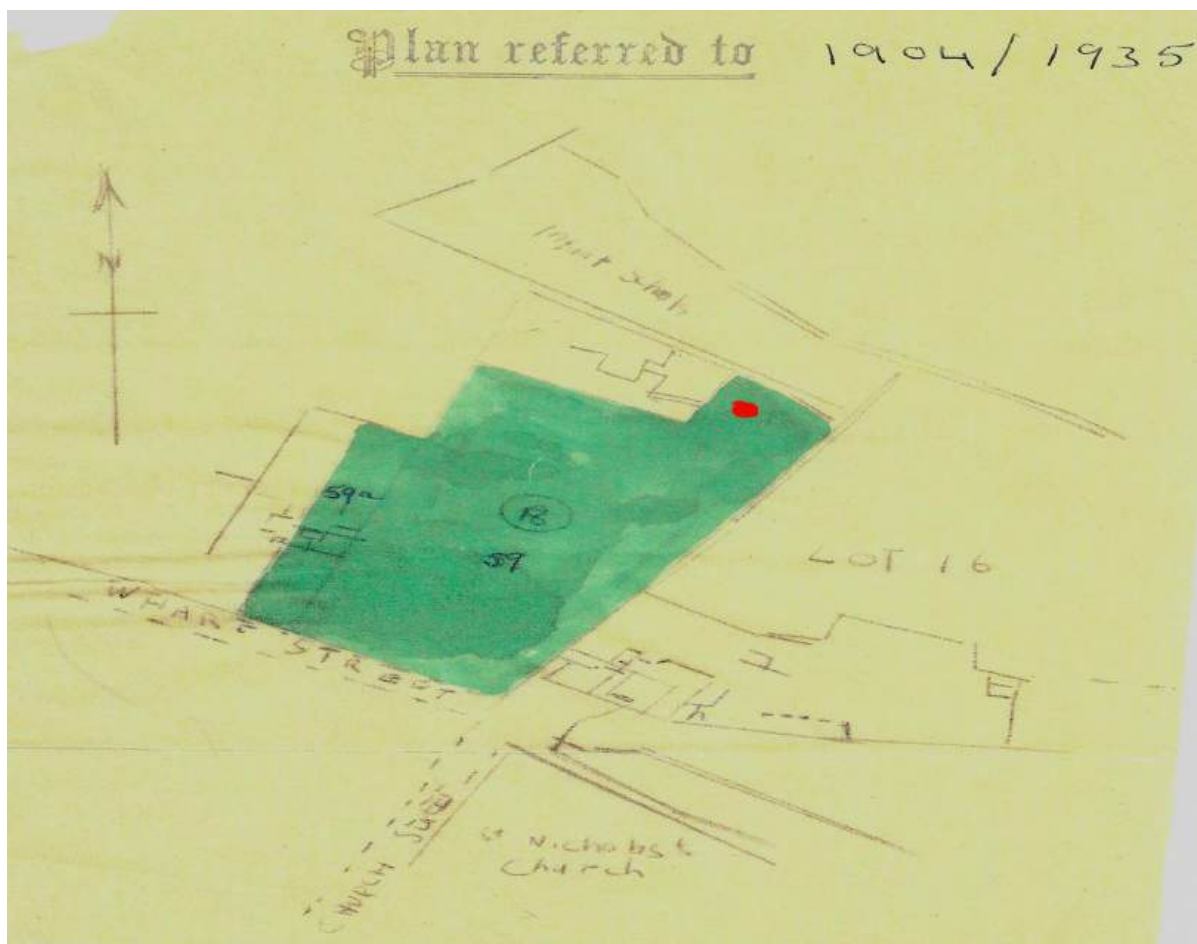
Our visit to this site resulted in no items or evidence relating to the mosaic floor observation or dating related to our Hunt for Roman Bawtry. Whilst it would have

been encouraging to have identified some indicators such as, a tesserae piece, coin, or pot, the absence of evidence whilst not bolstering the floor observation does not dismiss recognition of the eyewitness account; there are other avenues with potential to follow and who knows what opportunities may emerge in the future.

What did we learn? The answer to this question is divided into two categories.

Firstly, did we discover anything new from a heritage perspective that is pertinent in the BHG's stated mission to "preserve our past for the future"? Secondly, what did we learn from this live experience of archaeology?

Regarding the first question. We know from our own research into Ida's View (see the Modern History section of our website) that the space we explored was, prior to 1963, at the northeast end of a paddock which belonged to the residents of the Poplars on Wharf Street. Map one below shows the paddock, marked in green as it was in the period 1904-1935. Our dig site is marked red.



Map 1.

In respect of our trench in area two we were in the most northwesterly section of a narrow extension to the paddock adjacent to the plot marked as an "Infant School". The most prominent finds from this trench were the line of modern bricks

orientated on a north-south line for an undetermined length in either direction, and the array of iron finds which appear associated; potentially a fixture from a gateway, or outbuilding door (see photograph 10). There is no way of definitively concluding whether these finds related to a structure in what would have been the paddock, or to some aspect of the long demolished school building. The current owner of the garden has been in residence since 1974 and was mystified by the line of bricks. There is however a chance that they may be associated with previous tenants, the housing block having been constructed in 1964.

Our pre-dig survey explored a late 19th century map of Bawtry which clearly shows the existence of Priory Place in the immediate locality of our dig and the original floor discovery. Priory Place first appears on census returns in 1861 but had disappeared by 1911. Judging by the entries this location had only a small number of dwellings. Map Two below shows the location of Priory Place.



Map 2. Late 19th century Bawtry, showing Priory Place.

When and why did this location disappear? Why was it called Priory Place? These are questions unresolved and until this activity not really in the BHG consciousness. There is a claim that cottages may have encroached into what was or what became the paddock. This however seems negated by the contemporary

map as Priory Place seems to be located a few metres to the northwest of where we were digging running off the south eastern corner of the old Primitive Methodist Chapel on Station Road. Note, two small roads or alleyways seem to run south from Priory Place the most easterly could be interpreted as running into the northern end of the school and into our area of activity.

This has provided a spark for further potential desktop exploration on what appears to be a long forgotten corner of the relatively modern Bawtry landscape.

As for question two, the reality of embarking on an archaeological excavation requires careful consideration and planning that transcends what is required to conduct the physical work. Consideration of issues regarding safety, legality, ownership and record keeping all require thought before beginning. This is so for even a small dig such as the one we conducted in DN10 6HP; larger digs will require planning greatly magnified. Notwithstanding it was very hot the physical excursion required was much more than perhaps we anticipated; sufficient labouring resources should be carefully considered along with how they are to be used, rotated and most importantly refreshed.

Expert advice was not required on this dig but as part of our plan we had opportunities for remote assistance if required.

Finally, whilst this dig had a very specific objective it is important to keep an open mind and maintain a pragmatic sense of reality, especially if the ultimate aim is to seek insight to events and features that may have been relevant millenia back in time.

Whilst focusing on the specific aim it is important not to be blinded by it. Managing the disappointment of not finding what you might have hoped for can be minimised by discovering something new and perhaps unexpected.